


Part I. Background

This section of the plan describes the background for managing recreation in Capitol State Forest—the nature of the land; recreation issues and challenges, recreation opportunities, use and demand; and the Capitol State Forest Volunteer Program.

The land

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Capitol State Forest is nestled near the southern population centers of the Puget Sound and is a popular destination for many outdoor enthusiasts. The forest is located only 15 miles southwest of Olympia, Washington and easily accessed off of Interstate 5 and Highway 101.

Capitol State Forest is part of a range known as the Black Hills, which includes Capitol Peak, Fuzzy Top, Rock Candy and Larch Mountains. Capitol State Forest is one of the largest contiguous blocks of DNR managed trust land in the state covering 91,650 acres spanning across western Thurston and eastern Grays Harbor counties. There are two small areas within the forest that are of private ownership. Weyerhaeuser company owns approximately 120 acres on Larch Mountain and 120 acres near the Noschka (county road) are currently broken into large-lot single-family residences. The forest boundaries include Highway 8 to the north, the Black River to the east, and Highway 12 to the south and west.

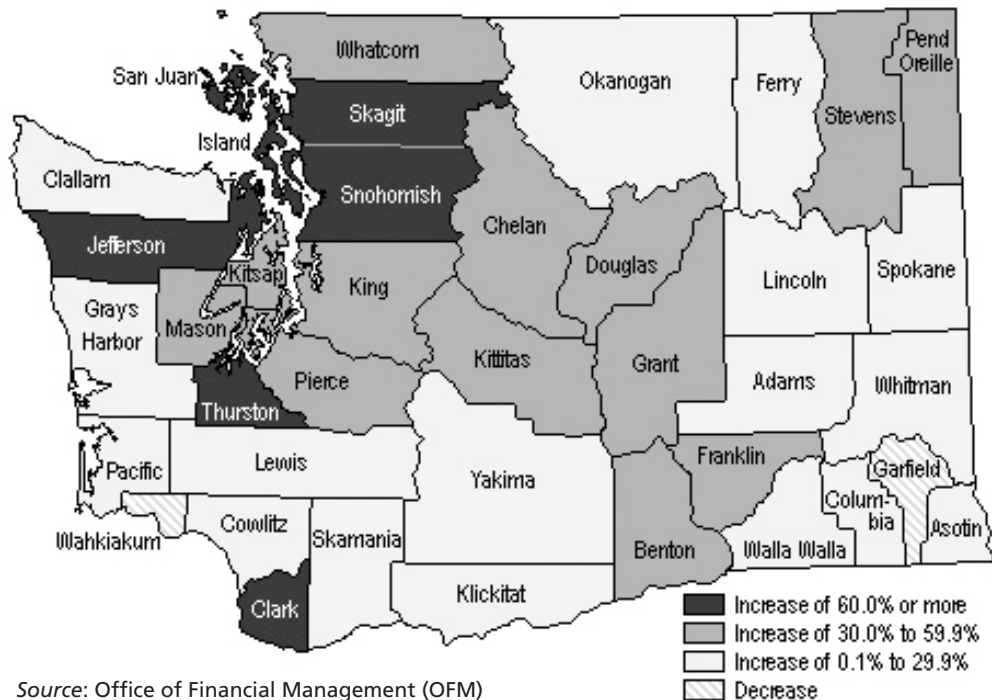
The natural setting of Douglas-fir, western hemlock, red alder and red cedar overstory, combined with an understory of salal, huckleberry, salmon-berry, blackberry, Oregon grape and various fern species make for a lush, rich in color, forested environment.

The elevation of the forest spans from approximately 200 feet along the Chehalis River up to its highest point atop Larch Mountain at 2,660 feet. This diverse terrain offers recreation experiences at various levels of difficulty.

Many existing recreation sites are situated near the major streams, such as Waddell Creek, Sherman Creek, Cedar Creek and Porter Creek. These streams, as well as hundreds of smaller streams, provide the drainage for the forest, where precipitation in the area averages 50 to 70 inches each year. Camping and picnicking at facilities near streams is very popular among recreational users.

The clay-based soils inherent in the area retain water, requiring time to dry during the winter season. Some forests, such as the Tayuha State Forest, have different soils types that can withstand year-round use. The soils in Capitol State Forest cannot withstand winter trail use, resulting in winter seasonal closures for most recreation users except mountain bikers and hikers.

Figure 2: Washington State population growth map 1980-2000



Source: Office of Financial Management (OFM)

Approximately 40,250 acres of the Capitol State Forest lie within Grays Harbor County, and approximately 51,400 acres lie within Thurston County.

SURROUNDING AREA

The western part of Capitol State Forest, situated in rural Grays Harbor County, is frequently accessed by local residents and neighbors, and is popular with hunters via State Highways 8 and 12. The eastside of the forest is located close to urban areas of Thurston and Pierce Counties, with easy access from Interstate 5.

Grays Harbor is the second slowest-growing county in the state. In 2003, the county's estimated population of 68,800 was up by 3.46 percent over the last ten years. Thurston County's population in 2003 was estimated at 214,800, an increase of 19 percent over the last ten years and more than 60 percent in the last 20 years. Thurston County is ranked as the twelfth fastest-growing county in the state. (Source: OFM)

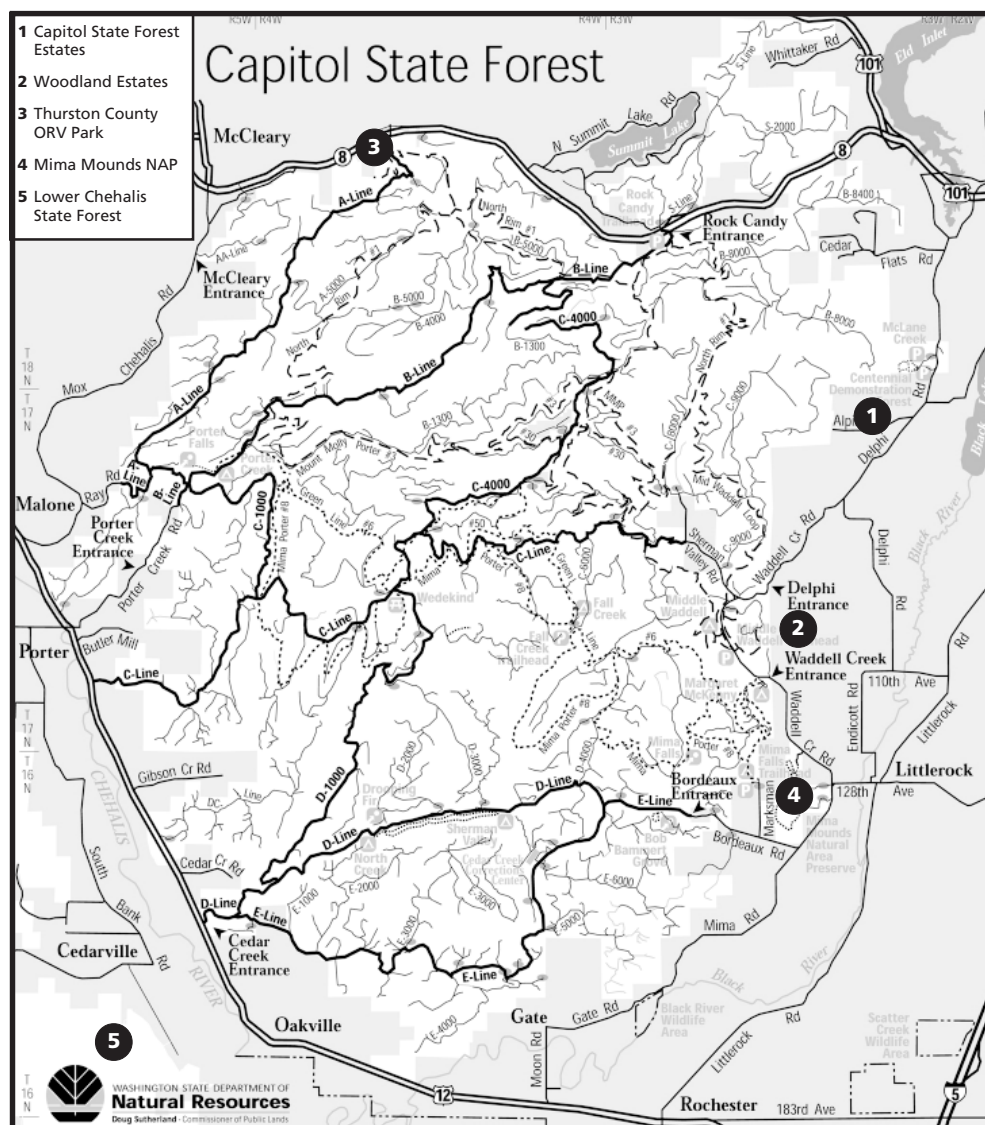
These two counties vary in population growth and dependence on the revenue generated by timber harvesting for its local economy. Grays Harbor County generates more of its total economy from timber resources than Thurston County. (Source: *Grays Harbor and Thurston County Profiles 2002*)

The surrounding area map (on next page) identifies the areas detailed below:

- 1. and 2. Residential development** in the area adjacent to Capitol State Forest, primarily in Thurston County, several communities—many new, such as Woodland Estates and Capitol State Forest Estates—exist and are neighbors to the forest.
- 3. Thurston County ORV Park** is located along the northern edge of Capitol State Forest, immediately adjacent to State Highway 8. This facility was closed in 2002 due to county budget challenges. The 155-acre site opened in 1979 and provided 5 miles of trail open to ORV and 4x4 use, a racetrack, grand stands, camping facilities and a

Figure 3: Capitol State Forest surrounding area map

Below: This black and white map is available on DNR's website: www.dnr.wa.gov to download.



caretaker's residence. This park received hundreds of visitors each year and many organized riding events were held there.

4. **Mima Mounds Natural Area Preserve (NAP)** consists of 624 acres of prairie and lies just east of Capitol State Forest near the town of Littlerock. This site is one of the best remaining examples of the unique "mounded" landscape, and was designated as a National Natural Landmark in 1968 by the National Park Service. Mima Mounds has a 3.3 miles of self-guided nature trail and an interpretative center describing many of the myths about the mysterious mounds.
5. **The Lower Chehalis State Forest** is west of Capitol State Forest just across Highway 12 and the Chehalis River. This block of DNR managed trust land is approximately 21,000 acres. The timber harvested from this block is similar to Capitol State Forest's, with areas of very steep terrain. There are no developed recreational areas in this block. The area is used for hunting, informal hiking, and equestrian use.

Recreation Opportunities

Capitol State Forest opened to the public in 1955 and continues to attract equestrians, off-road vehicle users, mountain bikers, hikers, hunters, and campers, as well as a variety of other dispersed recreation users. Capitol State Forest, commonly seen as “my backyard” to many of its recreational users, is a popular place to get away and recreate after work, during the weekend, or for a longer vacation.

Recreation opportunities range from developed primitive facilities, including campgrounds and day use areas and trails to dispersed uses such as hunting, fishing, target shooting and sightseeing. Permitted organized group events also take place across the landscape. Recreation opportunities are divided into five categories:

- Road Use
- Facilities
- Trails
- Dispersed Use
- Organized Events

The department considers new requests for recreation activities within Capitol State Forest and decisions are based upon whether the activity fits appropriately within the landscape and is compatible with current resource and recreational management objectives. In addition, current uses are increasing in the number of individual recreation users and the frequency of their visits to the forest.

ROAD USE

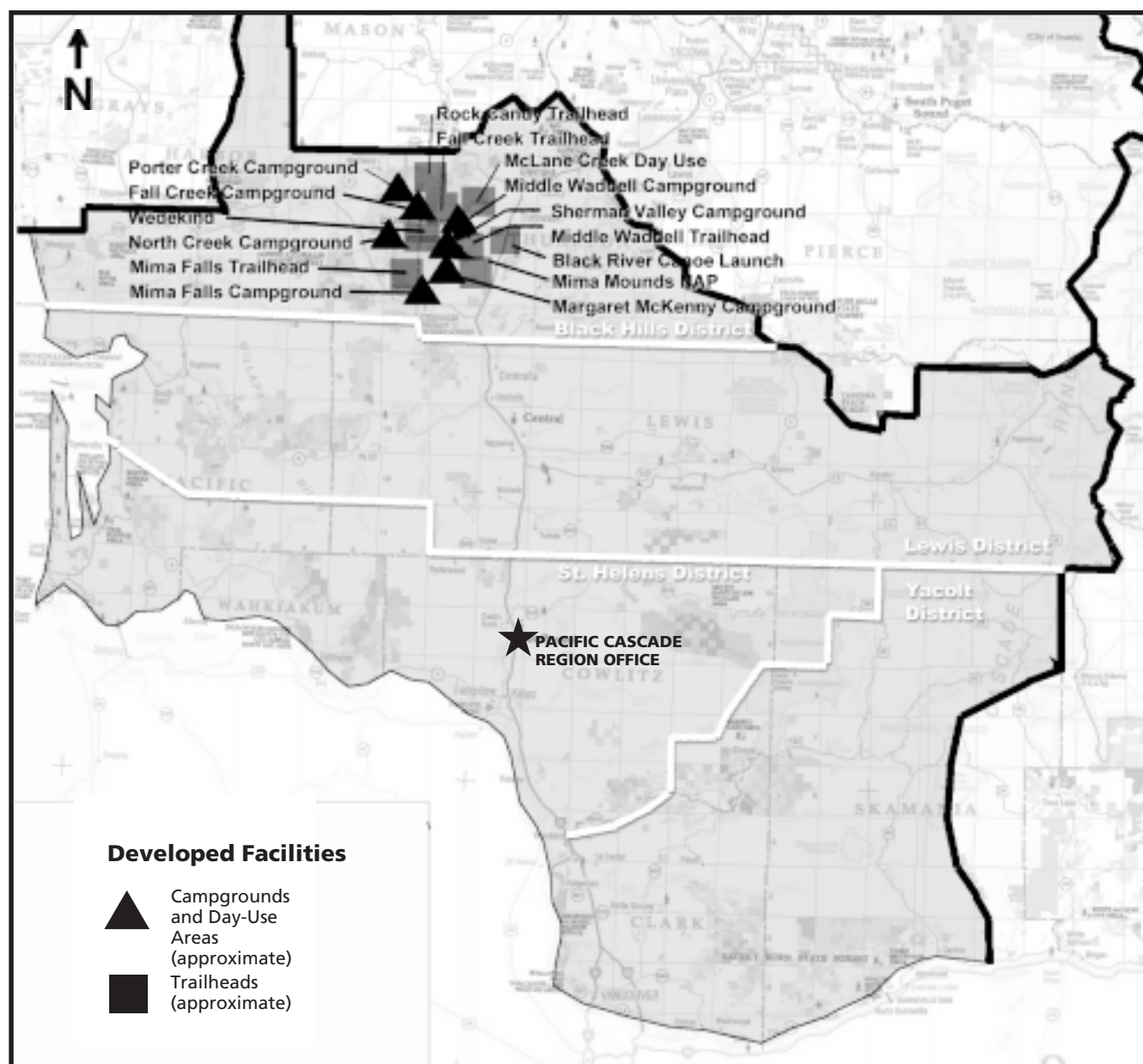
Approximately 575 miles of forest road wind through the Capitol State Forest. These roads were constructed for and are maintained primarily by the various trust management activities that take place within the forest. These roads exist to facilitate the management of the “working forest”; public access via this vast road network is considered a secondary use. At times the department restricts public access by posting roads closed or gating them.

All recreation activities are allowed on forest management roads year-round unless posted otherwise. It is important for the public to be aware that the roads are primarily used for timber management activities; and that recreational users of the road system are secondary users, and must share the roads year-round. Riding on road embankments or in streams is not allowed. Road users need to watch out for unmarked hazards. All off-road (ORV) vehicles must have a vehicle license or ORV permit tag and a Forest Service-approved spark arrestor. Any vehicular travel off designated roads or on deactivated or abandoned roads by the public is prohibited.

The forest’s facilities are considered primitive, providing no electrical hook-ups, sewer hookups or running water. Recent Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) improvements have been made to a majority of facilities in the Capitol State Forest. These improvements include ADA toilets, equestrian loading ramps and campsite amenities.

All facilities in the forest are open annually from April 1 through October 31, with the exception of three day-use/trailhead facilities which are open

Figure 4: Map of the Pacific Cascade Region with Capitol State Forest developed facilities



year-round: Rock Candy Trailhead, McLane Creek Nature Center and Mima Mounds Natural Area. Use of the facilities is free of charge and offered on a first-come, first-served basis. Facilities in the forest include:

- Seven campgrounds
- Five day-use areas which include interpretative facilities and trailheads

Chart 1: Developed recreation site inventory for the Capitol State Forest block

Site	Details	Allowed Uses
Fall Creek Campground S24-T17-R4W Lease #59-061001	11 campsites, water, 5 vault toilets, 1 horse mounting ramp, horse corrals and stalls	general camping, horse camping, hiking, mountain biking
Fall Creek Trailhead S25-T17-R4W Lease #59-069838	vault toilet, horse mounting ramp, hitching rails, information board	hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking
Margaret McKenny Campground S28,33-T17N-R3W Lease #59-058149	25 campsites, 1 picnic site, 1 host site, 8 vault toilets, horse mounting ramp, horse stalls	general camping, horse camping and riding, day-use picnicking, hiking, mountain biking
McLane Creek Day-Use Area S36-T18N-R3W Lease #59-061088	2 vault toilets, 3 viewing platforms, bench areas	open dawn to dusk for day-use hiking only
Middle Waddell Campground S(s)20&21-T17N-R3W Lease #59-069839	24 campsites (ADA), potable water, 4 vault toilets, host site	general camping, motorcycle riding, ATV riding, mountain biking
Middle Waddell Trailhead S28-T17N-R3W Lease #59-069839	parking, 2 vault toilets	day-use, motorcycle riding, ATV riding, mountain biking
Mima Falls Campground S4-T16N-R3W Lease #59-062347	5 campsites, 1 vault toilet; stalls, horse corrals, water	General camping, horse riding and camping, hiking, mountain biking
Mima Falls Trailhead S4-T16N-R3W Lease #59-061073	3 picnic sites, 1 vault toilet, a horse mounting ramp, hitching rails	Day-use picnicking, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking

Chart 1: Developed recreation site inventory for the Capitol State Forest block *(continued)*

Site	Details	Allowed Uses
Mima Mounds Day-Use Area - Natural Area Preserve S3-T16N-R3W	5 picnic sites, 2 vault toilets, an interpretive trail (2 miles, paved trail), kiosk	day-use barrier-free interpretive hiking, picnicking
North Creek Campground S8-T16N-R4W Lease #59-058130	2 vault toilets, potable water; no host	general camping
Porter Creek Campground S12-T17N-R5W Lease #59-058133	16 campsites (one ADA), host site, 4 vault toilets (2 are barrier free)	general camping, day-use motorcycle riding, ATV riding, mountain biking
Rock Candy Trailhead S19,20-T18N-R3W No Lease	Large parking area with 2 vault toilets	day-use picnicking, motorcycle riding, ATV riding, mountain biking
Sherman Valley Campground S11,12-T16N-R4W Lease #59-058151	7 campsites, 2 vault toilets, potable water; no host	general camping, hiking, mountain hiking, mountain biking
Wedekind Trailhead (closed due to abuse) S21-T17N-R4W Lease #59-058129	1 picnic site, 1 vault toilet, 1 picnic shelter	day-use trailhead, non-motorized, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking

FACILITIES

Campgrounds

Several of the forest's first campgrounds were originally opened to the public in the late 1950s. These camping sites were built adjacent to streams where the risk of having a forest fire was greatly reduced.

Currently, campgrounds in Capitol State Forest are located in a wooded setting, with many situated near a stream. Campgrounds vary in size from five to 25 campsites. Smaller campgrounds facilitate tent camping and small RVs, while the larger facilities have pull-through RV parking. Campground amenities include hand-pump wells, fire pits, picnic tables and vault toilets. Guests are invited to stay up to seven days per calendar year in the forest's campgrounds.

Day-use areas/trailheads

There are five day-use areas within the forest. Four of them serve as trailheads, which allow recreation users to park their vehicles and access the forest's trail systems. These trailheads provide vault toilets, garbage cans and signboards with information about the forest. Camping is prohibited in these areas. These trailheads are often used to stage permitted group events during the use season.

The McLane Creek Nature Center is an interpretative day-use area located in the eastern portion of the forest. This area provides 1.5 miles of non-motorized hiking trail that loops around a forest pond and creek used for salmon spawning. This area is closed at night, and has amenities such as vault toilets and interpretive signs.

TRAILS

The recreation trails are divided into two separate systems—motorized and non-motorized. The northern portion of the forest has 89 miles of motorized trails used by motorcycles, ATVs, hikers and mountain bikes. The southern part of the forest has 62 miles of trail for non-motorized use, such as horseback riding, hiking and mountain biking. In addition, there are ten miles of hiker-only trails.

Annual seasonal trail restrictions apply to motorized use and to horseback riding from November 1 to March 31. Mountain bikes and hikers may use either system, year-round. Currently, trail use in the forest follows the guidelines below:

- Unsigned trails are closed
- Riders need to respect the rights of others on the trail
- Travel off designated trails is prohibited
- Riding in streams or flowing water is prohibited
- Motorcycles and ATVs must have a vehicle license or an ORV tag and a US Forest Service-approved spark arrestor

Chart 2: Inventory of Capitol State Forest trails - approximate trail mileage

MOTORIZED

Trail Name	Approximate Mileage
Rock Candy East	2.25
Rock Candy West	2.25
North Rim #1	25.50
Mt. Molly Porter #3	20.90
Middle Waddell Loop	8.00
Lokkie Trail	8.00
Mt. Molly Loop	7.70
Trail #51	0.40
Trail #50	2.00
Trail #40	5.10
Trail #30	4.50
Trail #20	2.10
Total 88.70	

Chart 2: Inventory of Capitol State Forest Trails - approximate trail mileage *(continued)*

NON-MOTORIZED

Trail Name	Approximate Mileage
Mima Porter #8	31.90
Green Line 6	21.00
Waddell Loop	3.00
Trail #50	1.00
Trail #40	1.30
Trail #30	0.70
Trail #6A	2.25
Trail #20	0.5
Trail #10	0.70
Subtotal 62.35	

NON-MOTORIZED (HIKER-ONLY)

Trail Name	Approximate Mileage
McLane Creek	1.50
Fuzzy Top	0.40
North Creek/Sherman Valley	1.60
Cedar Creek	2.80
Porter Creek	0.70
Bob Bammert	1.00
Drooping Fir	2.50
Subtotal 10.50	
Non-Motorized and Hiker Only Total 72.85	

DISPERSED USE

Dispersed recreational activities occur throughout Capitol State Forest. These types of activities are often conducted by individuals or small groups, and are usually done outside of the constructed recreation facilities and trails. Some of these activities, such as hunting, have occurred for several decades within the Black Hills. Dispersed recreational activities include:

Hunting

Hunting occurs throughout the forest from August through April. Currently, the various hunting seasons are:

- Turkey season in March and April
- Bear hunting from April to December
- Deer and elk archery hunting in September
- Deer and elk muzzle loader season in the first week of October
- Deer and elk modern firearm season from the latter half of October to mid-November
- Elk rifle season in the first half of November
- Grouse hunting from September through December

Fishing

Fishing opportunities extend up the Sherman Creek tributary past Fall Creek Campground. Fishing also occurs along Porter Creek, upstream from the developed campground.

Target shooting

Recreational target shooting occurs throughout the block, with the majority of it occurring along the C-Line Road. Target shooting on the C-Line extends from the C-Line Road junction with the county's Sherman Road, all the way to Camp Wedekind. Triangle Rock Pit, a gravel pit near the intersection of the Sherman and Waddell Creek county roads, is also a popular shooting area.

Sightseeing and hang-gliding

A popular area for people to go sightseeing is along the southeast portion of the E-Line Road, an area featuring vistas across the landscape of the Chehalis River Valley. People have been known to hang-glide along this same route, due to the high elevation.

Firewood cutting

Firewood cutting is allowed year-round outside of extreme fire weather closures. People cut firewood throughout the forest in areas that have been recently harvested. Firewood cutting requires a permit from the Pacific Cascade Region office in Castle Rock.

Recreational berry and mushroom gathering

Berry gathering occurs usually in the late summer months. Recreational berry pickers have their choice of many varieties of berries. The most sought after berries are blackberries, black caps, huckleberries, salmon berries and thimbleberries. Many people also enjoy gathering mushrooms. Morrell mushrooms are gathered in the spring and Chanterelle mushrooms during the fall. Gathering of berries and mushrooms are for recreational use only, and not for commercial activities.

ORGANIZED EVENTS

The department allows recreation clubs and general recreation users to apply for a land use license to hold an organized activity within the forest. There are requirements that applicants must meet and not all activities may be appropriate in Capitol State Forest. The majority of the permitted events that do occur within the forest use the forests' vast trail system.

Organized events, defined as having 25 or more participants, range from 25 to 600 participants. Over the past five years, approximately 17 events per year have been permitted. Together these events can draw as many as 5,000 participants. Most of the recreation clubs sponsoring these events complete volunteer trail work before and after the event. The recreation club sponsoring the event must apply for a land use license and provide proof of insurance. In 2004, the following events occurred:

- Six mountain bike events
- Six motorized events
- Five horse events
- One mountain running event

**Chart 3: Capitol State Forest organized event table
2000-2004**

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004*
Equestrian	4	4	5	7	5
Mountain biking	4	7	4	4	6
ORV	5	6	7	7	6
Hike/Running	0	0	0	1	2
Total Event Per Year	13	17	16	19	19

*As of 10/2004

Permitted activities that do not use the trail systems include Boy Scout camp-outs, guided forest tours, and plant identification events.

*Volunteers
donated 3,500
hours in 2003.
On an average,
volunteers
donate over
3,000 recorded
hours per year in
the forest.*

Capitol State Forest Volunteer Program

Capitol State Forest relies heavily on the work done by volunteers to help build and maintain trails and recreation facilities. Volunteers of all ages and walks of life work together to meet DNR's multiple use mission. Volunteers routinely contribute by picking up garbage, conducting trail and facility maintenance, or providing information to visitors. Most people volunteer with an organized recreation group. Currently, there are 17 active recreation clubs volunteering within the forest. Over the years, many younger individuals have donated their time and improved the forest facilities and trails while completing a service or class project.

The department regularly uses volunteer labor to assist in the completion of projects that are funded by grants from the Interagency Agency Committee for Outdoor Recreation.

ADOPT-A -TRAIL

Many recreation user groups volunteer through DNR's Adopt-a-Trail Program. Recreation clubs adopt sections of trail for maintenance work and light improvements. Seven recreation user groups/recreation clubs have adopted more than 60 miles of horse trail and over 40 miles of ORV trail.

Those recreation clubs that don't have an official "adopt-a-trail" agreement participate in other organized volunteer projects, such as:

- Early trail clearing and response to large storm events
- Emergency trail assessments following an earthquake or other natural disaster
- Large forest-wide clean-ups in the spring
- Large collaborative group projects year-round

Additionally, Boy Scouts and Eagle Scouts volunteer by doing projects in our campgrounds each year.

CAMPGROUND HOSTS AND GATEKEEPERS

Campground hosts and gatekeepers act as the “eyes and ears” of the forest, providing visitors with information, and reporting inappropriate activities to department staff. Volunteer hosts and gatekeepers are provided the tools and training necessary to safely conduct their duties.

There are two campground host sites, one each at Margaret McKenny and Middle Waddell Campgrounds. These sites provide volunteers with electricity, phone service, a septic tank and a holding tank for potable water. The department plans to continue and if possible enhance the volunteer campground host program within the forest.

Currently, two volunteer gatekeepers donate their services to DNR: one at McLane Creek Nature Center, and one monitoring the gate to the DC line road, which is used by the Disabled Hunter Program. These volunteers ensure the gates are opened and shut as appropriate, that the locks and gates are functioning properly and that the signage in the area is adequate.

**Chart 4. Capitol State Forest- Reported Volunteer Hours
Table 2001-2003**

	2001	2002	2003	Total Hours by Recreation User
Equestrian	133	599	1090.5	1822.5
Mt. Bike	99	40	0	139
ORV	1768	907	1884	4559
Gatekeepers	606	688	484	1778
Misc. Volunteers	420	119	112	651
Jeep Patrol*	500	562	0	1062
Total Hours by Hours	3526	2915	3570.5	10,011.5

**Jeep Patrol- This program was managed by the Thurston County Sheriff's Office and was disbanded in 2002*